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UNCLAS ABUJA 001761

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV ELAB EPET NI

SUBJECT: NIGERIA NATIONWIDE STRIKE -- ROUND ONE ENDS

REF: A. LAGOS 2107 AND PREVIOUS

1B. ABUJA 1727 AND PREVIOUS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. NOT FOR PUBLICATION ON THE INTRANET OR INTERNET.

11. (SBU) Late October 14 the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) declared that the "first phase" of its nationwide strike had been a success and would be suspended for two weeks to see if the GON rolls back the price increase on gasoline. Business was back to normal in most parts of the country on October 15, now that the strike is suspended, although banks, schools and some larger businesses reportedly still are observing the stay-at-home in Delta State.

12. (SBU) President Obasanjo's 32-member stakeholders committee, chaired by Deputy Senate President Ibrahim Mantu, is already drawing criticism from the NLC and several sectors of Nigeria's political class. One cause was Mantu's reportedly telling committee members that the committee was not a forum for negotiations, but rather for reaching solutions to discussing prices and a mechanism for stabilizing prices. It is unclear whether this committee will be a forum for resolving the suspended strike issue, although the committee's NLC members have not pulled out.

13. (SBU) NLC sources said in public and private that they thought the first phase of the strike had been a success. NLC President Oshiomhole claimed 95 percent of union members had participated, but was especially jubilant that so many non-NLC workers had stayed at home too. Even GON offices were affected. Econoffs going to a scheduled meeting at the Commerce Ministry October 14 as the strike was winding down, for example, arrived to find the Ministry's front doors locked because there were not enough junior staff on hand. A door at the back was open, however, and we were able to do our business.

14. (SBU) Comment: Back-door business of a totally different kind has been rather the norm for resolving the repeated gasoline price-hike strikes of the past. While real bargaining went through various conduits, some sort of public intermediary -- a committee of senators or governors, or a court -- stepped out on stage to reach a "resolution" that ended the labor action and temporarily rolled back at least part of gasoline price increase. The NLC's stay-at-home tactic this time seems to have been more successful than its demonstrations-based mass actions of the past, however. The bargaining could become rougher this time or the resolution different, better or worse for the NLC and GON adversaries.

ANYASO